

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Reformation Day
Matthew 11:12-15
October 30th, 2016

Matthew 11:12-15 is a strange Reformation Day text. It's short. It's about John the Baptizer who is the Elijah of the New Testament... and we wonder, what does this have to do with Martin Luther and the Reformation?

Plain and simple: John shared the Gospel message of the coming Lord and was opposed by a higher authority. So, too, Martin Luther preached the Gospel that stands on its own... the Word alone that gives forgiveness of sins – apart from works, the act of penance, and all who would say that more than just the Gospel is needed for salvation. Luther stood like a reed shaken by the wind. Who did the people go out to see? “*A prophet,*” asks Jesus earlier on in Matthew 11. And Jesus answers His own questions and says, “*Yes, I tell you, more than a prophet...*” John was more because his message was about the one to come, and not himself. He spoke of the Word made flesh, and similarly, so did Luther. It's simply this... The Word is the most important thing.

So we hear what Jesus says is important to hear. He says, “*Let him who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” What are they to hear? They are to hear the Word. What are they to hear with? Ears? Well, yes. But people have ears that don't work. They are deaf. So does that mean that deaf people can't hear the Word of God and are therefore lost? No, of course not. That's ridiculous. The “hearing” that Jesus talks about here in the text is faith. Have faith. So, we have THE WORD... and the Word only (*sola scriptura*)... and we have the “hearing” which is faith... Faith only (*sola fide*). And now what about that last part of the three pillars on the banner behind me... the three pillars of the Reformation... Grace only (*sola gratia*)?

I suppose grace could be what your teacher showed you... after you gave an inadequate answer on a test question, and he said, “Well, close enough,” and you got credit for attempting the problem.

It could also be what happens when you do something bad. You know, you “fall from grace.” This means you have fallen out of favor in one way or the other.

Or, you might say “grace” at the dinner table. In this way, “grace” means that you say a prayer.

Or, you might say, “Oh look, ‘so-and-so’ graced us with their presence this evening.” We could say this in a joking way or we may actually be agitated by it. In this way, the presence of someone else adds something special to the situation... or... if said in a sarcastic way, their presence is less than welcomed.

Or, we might say that someone looks or acts graceful. The way the ballerina moves is so graceful. “The elegant preacher speaks in such graceful ways,” says no one at Christ Lutheran in Platte Woods. See how many ways the word, “grace” can be used and understood.

But there is just one particular way that matters most to you and me – the way that God uses it. You see, when He uses grace He makes it literally come to life. Grace is embodied in the coming of Jesus, the Son of God... our God... gifted to you for death on a cross and life eternal to all who believe in him. In this way **GRACE IS THE FREE AND UNMERITED FAVOR OF GOD**. Free for you. Gifted to you!! This definition gives legs to the whole reason there was a

Reformation – a posting of those 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg Germany. There were things being added to Scripture alone, Faith alone, and Grace alone!! They claimed to make a person more holy, closer to God, more “valued” by God Himself.

You cannot merit your own grace. It completely and totally comes to you by the work of Jesus. You cannot save yourself. That work began and ended at the cross – so Jesus is able to call out, “*It is finished!*” You cannot do anything that is so pure that God would say, “Wow, you are a better person than your neighbor. I love you more.” Sound ridiculous? It’s because it is.

But it doesn’t stop us from thinking we are worth more. We have to have some kind of intrinsic value, right? I mean, we give our offerings as well as our time for the kingdom here on earth. This makes me worth more – valued more highly. Don’t get me wrong, the church on earth depends on the work and offerings of God’s people... that is why you are valued. But in the kingdom of heaven, value is seen by God the heavenly Father, through the blood of His only begotten Son Jesus. For heaven’s sake, your value is not based on what you do or what you don’t do.

You might have noticed the number 499 under the word, “Reformation” on the front of your worship bulletin this morning. That’s the number of how many Reformation Day Anniversaries. That’s a lot. And next year, of course, is a big one – 500. And we are celebrating. With an eye on our own anniversary – our 60th – we have been celebrating with a special anniversary campaign. We will also celebrate next year’s anniversaries in other ways as well. Our Missouri District President, Rev. Dr. L. Hagan will be our guest preacher. We will have other festivities planned as well – stay tuned. All of these opportunities and activities have a blessed purpose – to give us an opportunity to share our faith – Scripture alone, Faith alone, and Grace alone. And also, to remind us that who we are is important. We are proud of it.

We hear with the ears of our heart... that is our faith... of the grace God provides for His blessed children. “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” In other words, God’s people who hear with faith hear what God is saying about grace – THE FREE AND UNMERITED FAVOR OF GOD. God’s people hear with faith that He is our strength, and he is our stay in times of long suffering. We hear with faith that God, even in the toughest of times, promises to be with us always. We hear that God, when all that comes upon our lips are cries of frustration at what life is throwing at us, He even gives us the words in the Bible to lament those struggles and talk directly with Him about them.

In faith we hear and we know the blessings and the power and the glory of God’s love. A day like today reminds us of those three important pillars of our lives together as God’s children. It’s what we have. It’s what makes us who we are. It’s that which we rely on – because it comes from God. It’s not Luther’s ideas that we honor. It’s God’s Word and His work of supplying all that we need is what is important. Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.